

**Larisa Avram, Anca Sevcenco, Veronica Tomescu (eds.). 2021. *L1 Acquisition and L2 Learning. The View from Romance*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins. vi + 380 pp.**

**Reviewed by Ioana Stoicescu\***

The volume *L1 Acquisition and L2 Learning. The View from Romance* gathers papers presented at the prestigious language acquisition conference Romance Turn 9 (organised in Bucharest in 2018). However, it also includes three studies that were not presented at this conference. The papers focus on three main research directions, each tackled in one of the three parts of the book: syntactic complexity in language acquisition, crosslinguistic influence and interference in bilingual acquisition and L2 language learning, and interface-related phenomena in language acquisition. The volume offers a comprehensive overview of the acquisition of Romance languages, as the child languages featured are European and Brazilian Portuguese, Spanish, French, Italian, and Romanian (alongside English).

Chapter 1, “Acquisition of clitic climbing by European Portuguese children” (pp. 13-38), by Maria Lobo and Inês Vitorino, looks at the acquisition of clitic climbing in European Portuguese. The data come from both spontaneous production (the Santos corpus, Santos et al. 2014, age range 1;5-3;11) and elicited production data (64 children, age range 5;2-8;2). The results show that, despite being an infrequent occurrence, clitic climbing emerges before the age of three in child European Portuguese, as in child Spanish (Rodríguez-Mondoñedo et al. 2006); this finding is in line with the idea that the properties of the functional layer are acquired early – the children were aware of the conditions for clitic positioning; their productions evinced sensitivity to the presence of negation, which favours clitic climbing in European Portuguese.

The volume includes two studies on the production of relative clauses in Brazilian Portuguese. In chapter 2, “Strategies in the production of PP relative clauses in Brazilian Portuguese” (pp. 39-66), by Marina Augusto, Erica Rodrigues and Elaine Grolla, one finds an extension of the range of relative clauses whose acquisition is usually studied, as the study deals with prepositional relative clauses. In order to check for intervention effects, the focus was on unergative verbs (intervention by a DP subject) and weather verbs (no intervention due to the presence of null expletive subjects). The task was a preference elicitation task. The child participants were 4- and 5-year-old. The results showed that full PP relatives were not produced for either type of verb. PP relatives with an omitted preposition were produced instead, more often with weather verbs than with unergative verbs, showing that intervention does impede relative clause production. Intervention is claimed not to be the only factor that influences productivity. Processing limitations might also lead to an avoidance of subordination altogether, as demonstrated by the children’s production of simple PPs.

The following paper, “Cost reducing strategies in the production of Brazilian Portuguese relative clauses: Language impairment in the syntactic domain” (pp. 67-82), by Letícia M. Sicuro Corrêa and Marina R. A. Augusto, deals with the production of subject, direct and indirect object relatives by Brazilian Portuguese-speaking typically developing and mildly to severely language impaired children/adolescents (age range 11-12). The task was also a preference elicitation task. The study found that subject relative clauses were more productive than direct object relative clauses, while standard indirect object relative clauses were not produced by any of the children, proving that the acquisition of the latter is severely delayed. The production of direct object relative clauses was significantly poorer for the moderately/severely language impaired children than for their age-matched typically developing peers. In addition, the more qualitatively

---

\* University of Bucharest, Department of English, ioana.stoicescu@lls.unibuc.ro.

inadequate responses were given by the language impaired group. The study confirmed the conclusion presented in chapter 2, namely the fact that the higher the number of alternatives to relative clauses afforded by the language, the more likely the avoidance of complex relative clauses by children (whether typically developing or language impaired) becomes.

Chapter 4, “Some thoughts on (the acquisition of) control” (pp. 83-107), by Ana Lúcia Santos, explores the way in which the control acquisition data from European Portuguese match the predictions of various theories of control. According to the movement (Hornstein 1999) and smuggling (Belletti & Rizzi 2012) theories of control, object control should pose less problems in acquisition than subject control. Under the movement theory of control, subject control structures, like object relatives, involve movement past interveners and should be acquired with difficulty, at the same pace as object relatives. However, the data analysed by Martins, Santos, & Duarte (2018) disconfirm this prediction, since subject control was found to improve dramatically at 8-11, unlike object relatives. According to the smuggling account of control, object control structures with verbs like *order* do not necessitate smuggling and should not be delayed, while subject control with *promise*-like verbs do and, in their case, a delay is expected. Moreover, in this account, the lexical semantic properties of individual control verbs play a significant role, influencing the type of structure that can be derived – this predicts that developmental effects should appear for both subject and object control verbs. The data from sentence completion and imitation tasks indicate that children have difficulties in the production of object control structures and that different verbs develop at varying rates – *proibir* ‘forbid’, for instance, was found more difficult, especially at younger ages than *ajudar* ‘help’ or *ensinar* ‘teach’. Developmental effects were attested for both subject control with *prometer* ‘promise’ and object control verbs, demonstrating the importance of lexical acquisition. The differences found for object control verbs are in line with the smuggling account. However, a finding that cannot be explained by either the smuggling or movement accounts is that adults gave more object control answers than children in a novel verb task.

Variable number agreement in child Brazilian Portuguese is investigated in chapter 5, “The production of variable number agreement in Brazilian Portuguese: A procedural and developmental account” (pp. 109-131). The authors, Ana Paula S. P. Jakubów and Leticia M. Sicuro Corrêa, present data from an elicited production task, showing that the variability in the assignment of plural marking can be explained by the underspecification of the morphophonological number feature. The study also concludes that the variability found in child Brazilian Portuguese in this respect is also connected to sociolinguistic factors such as instruction, avoidance of non-prestige forms and high academic ability: redundant number agreement was attested in the output of children attending private schools, and those with good academic results.

In “Assessing children’s syntactic proficiency through a sentence repetition task: A comparison between cochlear implanted children and typically developing children” (pp. 133-169), Silvia D’Ortenzio and Francesca Volpato used a sentence repetition task testing structures with a complex derivation that involved A-bar movement. Four major types of structures are investigated for typically developing and cochlear implanted Italian children: (i) left dislocated sentences with resumptive clitics; (ii) clefts; (iii) subject and object long-distance *wh*-questions; (iv) oblique and genitive relative clauses. Cochlear implanted children had more difficulties than their typically developing peers with cleft sentences, ascribed by the authors to potential problems in the domain of prosody. Cochlear implanted children also performed slightly more poorly than typically developing children in the repetition of left-dislocated sentences with resumptive clitics, a difficulty linked to the need to compute two movement relations. Genitive and oblique relative clauses were problematic for both child groups, indicating that these structures are generally acquired late. Long-distance *wh*-questions were also more difficult for cochlear implanted children due to their complex derivation, including both subordination and the long-distance between the initial and final positions of the *wh*-element. The study shows that structures that involve a heavy

computational load are problematic for cochlear implanted children, and that their difficulties are not due to memory deficiencies, as their performance in the repetition of same syllable length control sentences was similar to that of the typically developing group. This study concludes the first part of the volume dedicated mostly to the impact of syntactic complexity in the acquisition of Romance languages.

The second part of the book includes three studies on bilingual acquisition and second language learning. The first of them, entitled “L1 effects in the L2 acquisition of long-distance binding in European Portuguese” (pp. 173-202), by Alexandra Fiéis and Ana Madeira, investigates the acquisition of the interpretation of the long-distance reflexive *si* in European Portuguese by Spanish and Italian speakers. In Spanish, reflexives can only be locally bound, while in Italian and European Portuguese, they can be both locally and long-distance bound. In Italian long-distance binding is available in infinitival and subjunctive structures, while, in European Portuguese, it is also available in indicative contexts. However, a first experiment showed that the L1 grammars of the Italian participants were not very different from those of the Spanish participants, exhibiting a strong preference for the local antecedent. The authors used a truth-value judgment task to check whether the EP reflexive *si* was interpreted as bound by a local embedded subject antecedent or by the long-distance matrix one. According to the results, unlike the native controls, both groups of B1 learners preferred a local antecedent, suggesting that transfer from L1 is at play. The B1 Spanish learners preferred the local interpretation initially, but accepted both the local and long-distance readings at the B2 and C1 levels in subjunctive contexts (less so in the indicative); this proved that the binding properties of *si* can be acquired, but are delayed, given the fact that the adequate interpretation of *si* requires tapping into semantic and pragmatic information. The B1 and B2 Italian learners had a preference for the local reading, but also accepted long-distance readings, whereas the C1 learners definitely preferred the local reading to the detriment of the long-distance one. The L1 effects found for the Italian group are ascribed to the transfer of the properties of the Italian anaphors *sé* or *proprio*.

In chapter 8, “On the nature of crosslinguistic influence: Root infinitives revisited” (pp. 203-227), Juana M. Liceras & Raquel Fernández Fuertes look at the production of English and Spanish root infinitives by English-Spanish bilinguals and English and Spanish monolinguals. They start from the typology of root infinitives based on the features [+/-P] (person) and [+/- R] (distinct infinitival marker) proposed by Liceras, Bel & Perales (2006). Spanish is a [+P, +R] language, while English is a [−P, −R], which suggests that, in bilingual acquisition, Spanish should have a facilitating effect on English because of the increased lexical transparency of these features in the former. This hypothesis was tested against longitudinal data from two English-Spanish bilingual children and two Spanish/English monolingual children. The authors found no crosslinguistic influence from English into Spanish or from Spanish into English. The rate of root infinitives was not higher in bilingual Spanish than in monolingual Spanish. This was due to the morphological complexity of Spanish root infinitives which hindered production. The rates of root infinitives in bilingual and monolingual English were also similar. The authors ascribe the lack of influence of the [+P], [+R] features of Spanish over English to the fact that these features are affixal and contribute to affixal rather than lexical transparency. The features are not impactful enough to shorten the production of root infinitives in English. The authors conclude that a facilitating crosslinguistic influence effect is more likely to appear in domains where transparency is lexical, not affixal, e.g. copulas and subjects (Spanish has two copulas (*ser* and *estar*) and two types of pronominal subjects, null and overt).

The next chapter, “Can explicit instruction help L2 learners overcome persistent L1 interference? The case of free inversion in L2 English” (pp. 229-256), by Joana Teixeira, sheds light on the question whether European Portuguese learners of English eliminate subject verb inversion (\**Arrived the police.*) from their L2 grammars following explicit instruction. Two

studies were conducted to this effect. The first one demonstrates the acquirability of the target SV word order in English, despite the presence of delays, but also showed that the VS word order was more difficult to remove for the learners who had a null subject language as L1 (European Portuguese) than for the French learners (used as controls), as French is a non-null-subject language. This was in line with the Interface Hypothesis (Sorace 2011), according to which narrow syntax properties such as subject verb word order are acquirable. The second study, which focused on the effect of explicit instruction, shows that instruction worked better for advanced learners, helping to improve their word order performance, but did not lead to durable learning for the B2 participants.

The following five studies are included in the third part of the book, which focuses on language acquisition at the interface. Chapter 10, “Combining Focus VS and Topic constructions: The acquisition of discourse and conversational dynamic strategies in child Italian” (pp. 259-288), by Mara Frascarelli and Tania Stortini look at the acquisition of focus and topic conditions, checking whether there were any statistically significant associations between VS orders and Topic types in child Italian. The results indicate that, given the VSO order, Corrective Focus and Broad Focus correlated more strongly with right-hand Topics than Information Focus. The authors argued that both Broad Focus and Corrective Focus are linked to the introduction of whole assertions in the interlocutor’s common ground, and this makes the realization of objects as right-hand Given-Topics more likely, a fact also supported by the prosodic analysis of the child utterances. As for the OVS order, it is more frequently linked to Information Focus rather than Broad Focus or Correction Focus, as well as left-hand Aboutness-shift Topics. Overall, the data prove that information structure and discourse competences are delayed, and the age of 7 marks an important stage in their development.

In chapter 11, “Gender marking in L1 and L2 French: Syntactic complexity, lexical category and phonological expression” (pp. 289-314), Marco Brill looks at the impact of these factors on how gender agreement is handled in the written discourse by native French and L1 Dutch L2 French speakers. Only the first two factors were found to be significant. Considering syntactic complexity, the attributive position (of adjectives or past participles) induced better performance, as did adjectives vs past participles. Agreement structures that were more local (noun-adjective) were less computationally taxing than more complex ones (past participle agreement configurations). At the same time, the input was richer when it comes to adjective noun agreement. The comparison between silent vs overt markings did not indicate any significant difference between the two categories.

In chapter 12 “The acquisition of disjunction under negation and recursive *ni* in French” (pp. 315-330), Maria Teresa Guasti, Elena Pagliarini & Stephanie Durlemann explore the acquisition of negative disjunctive sentences in child French (*Le chat n'a pas mangé la carotte ou le poivron*. ‘The cat didn't eat the carrot or the pepper’). Such sentences admit only an “at least one” interpretation in French, which is characterized as a +PPI disjunction language, given the Disjunction Parameter (Goro 2007). Thus, OR is interpreted out of the scope of negation (‘The cat did not eat the carrot or the cat did not eat the pepper’). According to the Semantic Subset Principle (Crain, Ni & Conway 1994), children are predicted to assign initially the narrowest ‘neither’ interpretation to such sentences (‘The cat ate neither the carrot, nor the pepper’), corresponding to the -PPI value of the Disjunction Parameter, typical of languages such as English. This is indeed that the results showed. For French speaking children (aged 4-6), negative disjunctive sentences conveyed the ‘neither’ meaning (as in English), which shows that they had difficulty resetting the Disjunction Parameter to the adult value in the absence of a trigger that proved helpful in child Italian – the presence of a minimal pair of items that lexicalized the same logical operator OR. It is argued that, in Italian, *o* and recursive *né* form such a pair, with *o* lexicalizing +PPI OR, and *né* NPI OR. Thus, in Italian, children have access to an expression that

is clearly linked to the ‘neither’ meaning, leaving *o* for the ‘at least one’ meaning, which helps them reset the parameter. This is what Pagliarini, Crain & Guasti (2018) had previously shown. In French, despite the presence of recursive *ni*, the latter element is a negative word, not an NPI, and thus does not form a minimal pair with *ou*. In the absence of the minimal pair trigger, French-speaking children have trouble resetting the Disjunction Parameter at the age tested.

Adina Camelia Bleotu investigated the acquisition of scalar implicatures in child Romanian in Chapter 13, “Deriving scalar implicatures with quantifiers by Romanian children” (pp. 331-353). The study extended the age interval previously investigated in Stoicescu, Sevcenco & Avram (2013) and Stoicescu, Sevcenco & Avram (2015) (4-6 years) to 7 and 9-year-old typically developing Romanian-speaking children. The quantifiers used were *unii* ‘some’ and *cățiva* ‘some’. The question that was asked was whether children were able to derive ‘but not all’ scalar implicatures at adult-like rates at this age. The experiment employed a binary pragmatic felicity judgment task. The data reveal that, regardless of the age or quantifier tested, the child participants produced significantly less scalar implicature responses than the adult group. The children’s knowledge of the semantics of the quantifiers tested was, however, adult-like. At the same time, the results show that there is a developmental trend, as the 9-year-olds performed closer to the adult standard than the 7-year-olds.

The last chapter of the volume, “The acquisition of mood in child Spanish” (pp. 355-378), by Aoife Ahern and Vicenç Torrens, looks at the potential connection between the acquisition of the subjunctive mood and the availability of the Theory of Mind in child Spanish at ages 4 to 7. The development of the Theory of Mind was tested using belief comprehension and wish tasks. The ability to produce the subjunctive mood was tested using correction/story retelling task. The authors found that the children’s competence with the Theory of Mind correlated with their performance in the production of the subjunctive; the correlation was stronger for adverbial clauses than for nominal clauses.

This is an exceptionally rich and informative volume, covering an extensive range of language phenomena (the acquisition of clitic climbing, relative clauses, control, agreement, long-distance binding, focus and topic constructions, disjunction, scalar implicatures and the subjunctive). These are all topics of great relevance to both advanced researchers and PhD students interested in language acquisition. Another merit of the volume is the wide range of participant populations taken into consideration: typically developing, but also cochlear implanted children and monolingual/bilingual children and L2 learners. The volume is thus an extremely valuable and useful addition to the literature on language acquisition and language learning.

## References

Belletti, A. & Rizzi, L. 2012. Ways of avoiding intervention: Some thoughts on the development of object relatives, passive and control. In M. Piattelli-Palmarini & R. C. Berwick (eds.), *Rich Languages from Poor Inputs*, 115-126. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Crain, S., Ni, W-J. & Conway, L. 1994. Learning, parsing and modularity. In C. Clifton, L. Frazier & K. Rayner (eds.), *Perspectives on Sentence Processing*, 443-467. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Goro, T. 2007. Language-Specific Constraints on Scope Interpretation in First Language Acquisition. PhD dissertation, University of Maryland.

Hornstein, N. 1999. Movement and control. *Linguistic Inquiry* 30 (1): 69-96.

Liceras, J. M., Bel, A. & Perales, S. (2006). ‘Living with optionality’: Root infinitives, bare forms and inflected forms in child null subject languages. In N. Sagarra & J. A. Toribio (eds.), *Proceedings of the 2006 Hispanic Linguistic Symposium*, 203-2016. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Press.

Martins, A., Santos, A. L. & Duarte, I. 2018. Comprehension of relative clauses vs. control structures in SLI and ASD children. In A. B. Bertolini & M. J. Kaplan (eds.), *BUCLD 42: Proceedings of the 42<sup>nd</sup>*

*Annual Boston University Conference on Language Development*, 493-506. Sommerville, MA: Cascadilla Press.

Pagliarini, E., Crain, S. & Guasti, M. T. 2018. The compositionality of logical connectives in child Italian. *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research* 47: 1243-1277.

Rodríguez-Mondoñedo, M., Snyder, W. & Sugisaki, K. 2006. Clitic-climbing in child Spanish and the theory of parameters. In A. Brugos, M. R. Clark-Cotton & S. Ha (eds.), *BUCLD 29 Online Proceedings Supplement*. [www.bu.edu/bucld/proceedings/supplement/vol29/](http://www.bu.edu/bucld/proceedings/supplement/vol29/).

Santos, A. L., Généreux, M., Cardoso, A., Agostinho, C. & Abalada, S. 2014. A corpus of European Portuguese child and child-directed speech. In *Proceedings of the 9<sup>th</sup> Conference on Language Resources and Evaluation – LREC 2014*, 1488-1491. European Language Resources Association (ELRA).

Sorace, A. 2011. Pinning down the concept of ‘interface’ in bilingualism. *Linguistic Approaches to Bilingualism* 1 (1): 1-33.

Stoicescu, I., Sevcenco, A. & Avram, L. 2013. Scalar implicatures: A linguistic marker of developmental dyslexia in Romanian? In L. Avram & A. Sevcenco (eds.), *Topics in Language Acquisition and Language Learning in A Romanian Context*, 161-182. Bucharest: Editura Universității din București.

Stoicescu, I., Sevcenco, A. & Avram, L. 2015. The acquisition of scalar implicatures in child Romanian. In M. Burada, O. Tatu & R. Sinu (eds.), *11th Conference on British and American Studies – Embracing Multitudes of Meaning*, 141-155. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.